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SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN SYRACUSE, NEW YORK.

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PLANS ARE UNDERWAY TO PROVIDE RACIAL BALANCE THROUGHOUT THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OF SYRACUSE, NEW YORK. OF THE APPROXIMATELY 31,000 CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE SCHOOLS, 18 PERCENT ARE NONWHITE. WHEN AFTER THREE YEARS A WELL-RUN PROGRAM OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION FAILED TO PRODUCE ANY MEASURABLE ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT AMONG STUDENTS AT THE THREE PREDOMINANTLY NONWHITE SCHOOLS, ADMINISTRATORS BEGAN TO BUS SMALL NUMBERS OF NEGRO PUPILS TO HIGH-ACHIEVING WHITE SCHOOLS. THE 30 PUPILS WHO WERE BUSED MADE SIGNIFICANT ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND, WHEN INTERVIEWED, IMPLIED THAT IT WAS THE ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION OF THEIR WHITE CLASSMATES WHICH MADE THEM ACHIEVE MORE. TWO OF THE THREE NEGRO SCHOOLS WERE THEN CLOSED AND PUPILS BUSED TO INTEGRATED SCHOOLS. COMPARED WITH STUDENTS IN THE REMAINING NEGRO SCHOOL, THE TRANSPORTED PUPILS DOUBLED THEIR ADVANCES IN READING ACHIEVEMENT. HOWEVER, WHEN IN RESPONSE TO PRESSURES FROM THE NEGRO COMMUNITY PLANS WERE FORMULATED TO CROSS-BUS WHITE PUPILS INTO THIS MAJORITY NEGRO SCHOOL, THE WHITE COMMUNITY OBJECTED. RECENTLY, A PROGRAM OF COMPULSORY REASSIGNMENT OF CERTAIN NEGRO PUPILS TO INTEGRATED SCHOOLS HAS BEEN BEGUN. ALSO PLANNED IS AN INTEGRATED "EXCEL" SCHOOL FOR GIFTED PUPILS. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT BY SEPTEMBER 1968, NO SYRACUSE PUBLIC SCHOOL WILL BE MORE THAN 50 PERCENT NEGRO. NEVERTHELESS, FOR THIS TO HAPPEN THERE MUST BE A "CAMPUS PLAN" OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMPLEXES AND MORE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA'S CITIES, SPONSORED BY THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 16-18, 1967. (LB)

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Prepared by
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for the
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in America's Cities
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Syracuse is a reasonably typical, moderate-sized city. The public school system has about 31,000 children, about 18% of whom are non-white. The proportion of non-white children has been increasing about one percentage point per year and presumably will continue to increase on this basis for the years immediately ahead. There are 32 elementary schools, 7 Junior High Schools, and 4 Senior High Schools. There is a seven-member School Board, which serves without pay, and is elected bi-annually on a city-wide basis for overlapping four-year terms; the nominations are made by the political parties.

Although the Syracuse School system has not solved the problem of racial balance, the School Board has been exercising some

leadership in this area. This is quite an important fact, for I am convinced that School Board leadership is essential if very much is going to be accomplished in this or any other highly controversial area. A School Superintendent, however able, dedicated, and persuasive he may be, simply cannot do it by himself.

Not all the efforts in Syracuse to assure quality-integrated education for all children have been successful, and some of the things which apparently have been helpful may have been the result of good luck rather than good planning or good leadership. But in recent years, our typical School Board member has been willing to put in a significant amount of time and effort to carry out his educational responsibilities. I would guess that individual Board members have averaged fifteen to twenty hours a week in this connection. Fortunately the Board reflects a reasonable cross-section of the city, including individuals who have membership in or close connection with the so-called business and political power structure. The present Board includes one Negro, a former President of the local NAACP Chapter. Given the exploratory nature of many of our efforts, these factors have been a help.

Five years ago Syracuse had two elementary schools and one Junior High School with a predominantly non-white student population. When the question of <u>de facto</u> segregation first arose, the Board's position was that the school system had not caused segregation and therefore had no responsibility to do anything about it. Although in 1962 the Board did vote, over my objections, to consider race as

an additional factor in the drawing of school boundaries, nevertheless our major efforts were first directed toward what is commonly known as compensatory education. When the New York State Commissioner of Education issued his 1963 directive to New York State School Boards to the effect that any school which was more than 50% non-white was, per se, inferior, and that every School Board with such a school must submit a program or plan to eliminate racial imbalance, my initial reaction was that this directive was ill-considered, illogical, and -- I hoped -- illegal.

Beginning in September, 1962, we had what I believe was a well-conceived, well-staffed and well-financed program of compensatory education in the three predominantly non-white schools. We did most all of the things normally done - small classes, special instructional materials, extra guidance counselors, remedial specialists - you name it and we had it. Two-thirds of the extra costs involved were picked up either by the Ford Foundation, or by a special New York State grant. The initial program commitment was for a three-year period. The Board became increasingly concerned toward the end of the period when, in spite of all the money which had been spent and the effort put forth, we couldn't demonstrate any significant or even measurable improvement in educational achievement. I don't think anyone expected a three-year miracle, but I, for one, thought that there ought to be some measureable improvement in reading ability or other comparable areas. Thus, when the Superintendent proposed that we transfer and bus 80-odd first, second, and third grade non-white stu-

dents to a high-achieving white school, such transfer was promptly approved by the Board, although it was clearly opposed by a majority of the community. Individual Board members simply did not believe that these few young, non-white children would have any major adverse impact on an 1100-pupil, all-white school - and if we couldn't demonstrate that what we had been doing in the prior years was having much educational impact, it was surely time to try something else. For this program we had the misfortune to get a Federal grant to study the integration process. The net result of the Federal grant was that we had so-called observers sitting in the classrooms and psychologists running around the halls talking with teachers, pupils and parents. This created such an abnormal situation that we really didn't find out much about integration under what would be normal conditions.

Simultaneously, for reasons not solely connected with integration, we transferred thirty Junior High School pupils from the predominantly non-white Junior High School to a predominantly white, high-achieving school. My own conversion from negative to positive on racial balance resulted from this second transfer, because it shortly became obvious to all concerned that most of the thirty students so transferred had a significant, and in several cases, a dramatic improvement in their levels of educational achievement. Because these children as a group were doing so much better than they had in prior years, each one was interviewed by the staff of our compensatory project and was asked essentially the same question: "Last

year you were in a small class, with many special services, and still you didn't do very well. Now you're in another school, with no one paying any special attention to you and you're doing much better. How come?" The answers boiled down to this. The kids said that if, in the predominantly non-white Junior High School, they cooperated with the teacher and did their homework, they were regarded by their classmates as "kooks". In their present school if they <u>didn't</u> cooperate with the teacher and do their homework they were regarded by their classmates as "kooks". To put it in academic terms, our compensatory education program apparently had not been successful in creating an achievement-motivated classroom environment. In the high-achieving white school, the favorable environment already existed, and most of the children responded to the environment and "caught" motivation from the other pupils. As a result of this experience the Board was receptive to the Superintendent's subsequent suggestion that we close two of our three predominantly non-white schools and disperse these children by busing around the city to available seats in existing classrooms, with not more than three or four assigned to any single class.

Individual Board members and the Superintendent and his staff spent untold hours in meetings with all kinds of groups in advance of Board action on this recommendation. At the time the question came to a vote, the Board had on hand resolutions of support

for the recommendation from such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, the Syracuse Teachers Association, the Metropolitan Development Association (probably our most potent civic organization), the Urban League, the NAACP, the Parent-Teachers Association, the Council of Churches, the local Taxpayer's Association, and many more. Thus there was very substantial broadly-based support for our first really major step toward integrated education, although I must stress that this favorable climate came into being because of special effort by the Superintendent, the staff, and individual Board members. The program had been well-publicized, well-explained, well-justified, and under these circumstances it was not difficult for individual Board members to approve it.

This out-busing program brought no particular problems - no drop-off in achievement levels in the receiving schools, no drastic increase in discipline problems, no flight of people from the city. On the other hand, there was some statistically significant improvement in achievement levels in reading achievement for a randomly selected group of the transferred children, matched against a control group in our one remaining predominantly non-white school. As a matter of fact, the advancement in reading achievement for the transferred pupils in the next school year was about double that of the control group. At this point both the Superintendent and the Board thought the solution to our racial balance problem was in sight. The Superintendent recommended that we close our one remaining predominantly non-white school over the next few years as classroom space could be

provided elsewhere, and thus eliminate de facto segregation by a system of out-busing. This proposal brought little or no resistance from the white community. However, there was an immediate reaction from the Negro community. It was said that out-busing alone was unfair - that busing was a burden and it should not be borne solely or primarily by the Negro students, who certainly had not caused segregation. The Negro demand was for cross-busing - the transfer of an equivalent number of white students into the predominantly Negro school. This was the only issue I can remember in the past seven or eight years on which the Negro community was absolutely united. When it become apparent that his proposal could be carried out only by completely alienating the Negro community, the Superintendent either changed his mind or saw that the Board would not approve, and he withdrew the recommendation. We had reached an impasse, since any form of compulsory cross-busing also seemed unacceptable to the white community.

With the out-busing solution dead, the Superintendent worked through the Council of Churches and the corresponding Catholic and Jewish organizations to set up a "voluntary" program of cross-busing. Personally, I never had the slightest degree of optimism that the clergy would have any effective influence with parents on this subject, and endeavored to persuade the Superintendent not to make the proposal at all, since it would not be accepted and we would be worse off than before. We were looking for 700 volunteers and actually got less than fifty. When this plan failed, the Board came under significant press-

ure from the Negro community who felt there was reason to question the good faith of the Superintendent and the Board. In effect, the Negro community wanted us to use compulsion on the white community to bring about integration - after all, we had closed two non-white schools and "compelled" the non-white students to attend other schools. Communication between the Board and the non-white community disintegrated. We had about six months of no dialogue and no progress.

After some months of inactivity, we got underway again last spring. In the first place, the Board adopted a new policy statement regarding racial balance, setting goals much more stringent than those which earlier had been imposed by the State Education Department. In effect, the Board declared its intent to work toward racial balance in each school, and defined racial balance as a percentage of non-white students not less than 50% nor more than 150% of the city-wide average for the grade level. In other words, if the city-wide average in elementary schools were about 20% non-white - and this is approximately the situation - we would consider any individual elementary school racially imbalanced if it had more than 30% or less than 10% non-white students. As of last spring, when the policy was adopted, we had one predominantly non-white elementary school, and four more elementary schools where the percent non-white was around 50%; there were seven or eight elementary schools that were imbalanced because there were too few non-white students. Of our secondary schools, none was imbalanced because of too many non-whites, but several were imbalanced because of too few.

The program recommended by the Superintendent to bring about this racial balance has two short-run facets already approved by the Board and one long-run proposal still under discussion. One of the short-run proposals was a system of controlled registration, whereby we propose to assign some non-white students who were new to any neighborhood to schools in a manner which would promote racial balance. Any non-white student already living in a neighborhood would be permitted to attend his neighborhood school, but new arrivals in the neighborhood might be assigned to other schools - and bused - in the interests of racial balance. This compulsory reassignment applied to non-white students only - but even for them was effective only for the current school year - any child so assigned to a school other than the normal neighborhood school had the option of returning to his neighborhood school for the next school year if he so desired, but it is our hope that most of the students affected by the program will graduate from the schools in which they are placed. The Negro community is less than enthusiastic about this aspect of the program, because it does use one year compulsion on some non-white students which is not applied equally to white students. In effect, we are asking some non-white students to carry the burden of this program; of course, it almost certainly will operate to their individual benefit. I should add that the same program includes a provision for voluntary transfers, with transportation provided, which contribute to racial balance, but the Board has had a voluntary transfer policy in effect for many years and in Syracuse this has not and probably never will

contribute appreciably to the solution of the racial balance problem.

The second interim step is the conversion over the next three years of the predominantly non-white school to an integrated "excel" school for gifted children. In this school this fall we have made provision for 210 students, with "excel" programs in language, science and mathematics which are not available elsewhere in the city and to which children may come by application or invitation only. Within thirty days after the announcement of the program we had almost 400 applications for the initial 210 spaces - obviously attracted by what will be an outstanding educational program. With white students coming voluntarily into the school we were successful, through the efforts of some persons in the Negro community and some of our own staff, in securing enough volunteers out to provide classroom space for the "excel" program. Unless there are some unforeseen difficulties, we expect the number of students in the program to at least double next year, and think the entire school will be converted the following year.

On the basis of the present programs it is probable that in September, 1968, no school will be more than 50% non-white; I think we could hold this level for several years ahead on the basis of present programs and policies alone. However, the ultimate achievement of racial balance in each school in the city probably depends on the implementation of a plan for elementary school construction in a campus plan - the development of an elementary school complex or complexes,

each serving 4,000 to 5,000 students. Each complex would consist of six to ten individual classroom buildings, each administratively a separate school, and each connected to a core building housing the expensive facilities such as auditoriums, cafeterias, physical education stations, health rooms, art rooms, language labs, science labs, etc. A detailed plan for the first such facility has been prepared and presumably will be recommended by the Superintendent for adoption by the School Board in the immediate future. Once again there will be a major attempt on the part of the Superintendent, the staff, and individual Board members to explain the program to the total community and to see that all questions are considered and, insofar as possible, satisfactorily answered. Hopefully, the same kind of organizational support for the program will be generated as was generated for the closing of two inner-city schools two and one-half years ago.

The campus schools can provide facilities and programs which could not conceivably be afforded in small, geographically dispersed, elementary schools; I think we will be able to demonstrate that such a facility could have elementary educational programs far superior to anything now available in Syracuse, or, for that matter, in our suburbs, and at roughly equivalent per-pupil operating costs. Syracuse does have the fiscal ability to proceed promptly with the initial campus; although our detailed planning for this complex and program was supported in part by foundation and federal grants. We may secure some special assistance from the same sources toward the con-

struction costs for the first campus. Our school system is fiscally dependent in the sense that for operating and construction funds the school system is just another department of the city. Syracuse has an able and progressive Mayor, however, and the establishment of a special office to study the campus plan and to prepare specific construction and program recommendations was announced jointly by the Mayor, the Common Council, the Superintendent, and the School Board.

Once we have the first campus site in full operation -- hopefully within three years -- our problem of racial balance will have been solved. There will be so many children bused that busing will no longer be looked upon as a problem. Incidentally, in New York State the State reimburses local school districts for 90% of most busing costs. We will have the ability to control racial balance by selecting the children who attend each individual campus school, or in some cases, who will fill spaces in other schools which will have been vacated because some of those children go to the campus schools. Indeed, it is likely that our major problem will be that we will have more parents who want their children to have the advantage of the campus program than can be accommodated on the initial campus.

Syracuse has not yet solved its problem. We do have a substantial degree of School Board community commitment to quality-integrated education. This was a commitment reached, at least on my part, somewhat reluctantly. Most of our community now recognizes that either we must find some effective method of educating disadvantaged chil-

dren or we're going to support them for the rest of their lives - and education, whatever it costs, is cheaper. We still have in Syracuse a few articulate advocates of compensatory education instead of integration. I don't think anyone can say with assurance that compensatory education cannot be made to work; but we could not make it work in Syracuse at any reasonable cost, and I don't know that it is working outstandingly well in any other urban area.

The only feasible approach is to work toward integration in a manner which "protects" the achievement levels of white students - since the white community will not stand by for any averaging down, nor should they. Time is critical, since the non-white community will not tolerate the continuation of the "second-class" educational environment now existing for many of their children, nor should they. I can visualize for Syracuse a system of quality-integrated education which we can afford, and which will be acceptable to all but a few of the "lunatic fringe" on both ends of the spectrum. At least for Syracuse the problem is solvable, although solutions to these kinds of difficult problems are never easy, and require a high degree of effort on the part of those responsible. Furthermore, any solution must be acceptable to and supported by the total community - and such acceptance and support are obtainable only if the School Board and staff provide the kind of leadership which both informs the community and inspires confidence in the programs and policies proposed. The real challenge to School Boards and School Staffs is to provide such leadership.